

**" J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: The Real and the Imagined Middle Ages "**



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TO: Prospective Seminar Participants  
RE: J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: The Real and the Imagined Middle Ages

This letter is our invitation to you to join the Company we wish to create this summer as 25 Institute Scholars join fifteen Tolkienists and us on a five-week journey. Our journey begins in an agricultural county that has the quiet rural ambiance of the green northeastern part of Texas. The journey will focus on the minds, hearts, and spirits of our Company as we explore the complex and varied world of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth through the primary text, the recent films by Peter Jackson, and the scholarship about the many sources that Tolkien drew on in the more than thirty years he spent creating what many see as one of the most complex of "alternate worlds." While this journey may seem to be daunting at first, we will do our best to guide our group through the challenges of exploring this world which, of course, as all the best "fantasies" do, will show us more about our own world and about ourselves.

We hope you will join us at Texas A&M University-Commerce, July 13 to August 13, 2009, for this Institute which is designed as an interdisciplinary project for Secondary English, Language, History, and Social Studies teachers. Teachers of other relevant humanities subjects are encouraged to apply as well, and we have no intention of selecting applicants to meet any pre-determined ratio among disciplines.

As co-Directors, we reflect an interdisciplinarity we see as vital to the reading and study of Tolkien's novel. Dr. Ford is a medieval historian whose area of specialization is popular religion in medieval England and who teaches courses in medieval history and introductory courses on the scope and methods of history. Dr. Reid is a poet who teaches writing and literature classes, whose interests include fantasy, science fiction and cultural criticism. We share a common passion for J.R.R. Tolkien's novel. We read the novel as children, both while on vacations in areas that heightened the impact of the work. Dr. Ford read it while her family was on a trip through the redwood forests of California, Dr. Reid on the coast of Western Washington, at a beach off the Pacific Ocean. Our interest in various aspects of the book, medieval history and theology, poetry, British literature, and linguistics, has carried on into our professional lives. As professors, we have had extensive experience with teacher education programs in English and History. We have designed our Institute to be a bridge connecting high school teachers with university professors expert in Tolkien's work.

Our interests as scholars and teachers led us to develop this Institute devoted to helping teachers to understand and explore *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's work is widely taught and recommended as a work of literature students should read in preparation to attending college. Our goal is to enrich the approaches to teaching this extraordinary novel. This Institute is the second one on Tolkien that we will run, and the projects developed by participants at the 2004 Tolkien Institute can be seen here:

<http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/tolkien/instituteprojects.asp>

We see *The Lord of the Rings* as a bridge for students, connecting the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which we now live with the cultures, history, and literature of the Middle Ages, a period that high school students often find inaccessible. We have designed the Institute to help high school teachers explore ways to use J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a pedagogical bridge as well as an object of analysis in its own right.

"J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: The Real and the Imagined Middle Ages" will explore the medieval influences as well as the modern interpretations and contemporary impact of Tolkien's epic novel. Through exposure to the ideas of some of the most important Tolkien scholars, guided research, and both live and electronic group discussion, Institute scholars will analyze *The Lord of the Rings* and develop ways to use it in their classes to illustrate how *The Lord of the Rings* has had a profound influence on the way modern people conceptualize the Middle Ages.

In addition to J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the Institute has four assigned readings. The first is John Blair's *The Anglo-Saxon Age: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002). This book, part of Oxford University Press's Very Short Introduction series, provides a brief but scholarly account of the history, politics, religion, and culture of Anglo-Saxon England. This book should provide an excellent starting point for evaluating the historicity of *The Lord of the Rings*. The second will be John D. Niles, ed., and Seamus Heaney, trans., *Beowulf: An Illustrated Edition* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2007). This recent edition of Heaney's translation includes over 120 photographs and illustrations of the art, architecture, and artifacts of the Anglo-Saxon period. The poem *Beowulf* is important not only as a significant source Tolkien used to inspire his fiction but also as a work frequently assigned—in translated excerpts—in high schools. The illustrations in this edition are also important because they will help the participants evaluate the presentation of early medieval material culture in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*, an aspect of historicity often over-looked in purely literary analyses. Third is John Garth's excellent study of Tolkien's experience of World War I, *Tolkien and the Great War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003). This work will help the participants to understand Tolkien as a modern soldier and gain insight into the twentieth-century notions of warfare, justice, and government that influenced both his scholarship and his fiction. Finally, the participants will read the chapter in Norman Cantor's *Inventing the Middle Ages* that deals with Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. This reading will help to clarify Tolkien's influence in shaping both historiography and popular culture.

In addition, we will supply lists of recommended readings, including some of the works of the visiting experts. Supplementary readings will include monographs, collections of essays, and periodical articles reflecting the range of contemporary scholarship relating to the five topic

areas. These readings will be made available electronically or as photocopies for Institute scholars.

The fifteen visiting Tolkienists who have agreed to participate in the Institute are preeminent scholars in their fields. Their expertise will introduce the Institute scholars to a broad range of topics which will afford them a better understanding of *The Lord of the Rings*. Each expert will lead one lecture-discussion session approximately four hours long, usually during the morning. The visiting experts will also meet and talk with the Institute scholars more informally during meals or receptions. The group will meet five days a week, four hours a day, for a variety of activities, including lectures, discussions, and workshops. The Directors will meet three times outside class with Institute scholars to discuss their plans and projects. Institute scholars will also attend screenings of Peter Jackson's film version of *The Lord of the Rings* and have group discussions about it. They will keep a Reading Journal of their questions about and responses to the lectures and readings, which will be read by the Directors at specified intervals.

The participants will produce three different kinds of written work. First, each participant will keep a journal of questions about and responses to the lectures and readings, which will be read by the Directors at specified intervals. Second, participants will participate in creating a university-based and gate-kept wiki dedicated to "Teaching Tolkien." This wiki will be restricted to the use of participants before, during, and after the Institute. Finally, the participants will produce teaching materials on *The Lord of the Rings* for their own classes. These will be presented in a mini-conference at the close of the Institute, and will be posted on the Institute wiki.

The wiki will provide ways for discussion between the participants to continue during the years after the Institute so that Institute scholars can share their experiences using their teaching materials with the Directors, other Institute scholars, and the guest experts. Dr. Reid has been teaching online classes for nearly three years and is working on the use of wikis by teachers for collaborative writing and research in a range of classes, undergraduate and graduate. She has presented on the use of wikis for a faculty development workshop. The Institute wiki will be housed on our university's servers and access will be controlled by Dr. Reid. Those Institute scholars who wish to develop their teaching materials and experiences into articles will be able to continue communication and collaboration with the Directors and with each other in the following year. As well as encouraging Institute scholars to write articles for publication, the Directors will work with the participants to propose sessions to be submitted to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and to the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan.

### **The Quest for the Institute**

As Gandalf, Aragorn, and Frodo learned, one can study maps and plan the journey, but circumstances can always change one's direction, perhaps for the better. At this point, we have mapped out the following chronology for our Quest (trying to avoid the Mines of Moria, the Balrog, Orcs, and Shelob):

**Week One:** July 13-17. The focus this first week is on introducing the Institute Scholars to each other, to the campus, and starting to think about "The Life and Works of J.R.R.

Tolkien." We will start with an Institute pizza party on Sunday and a walking tour of campus on Monday. We'll be reading the novel, and meeting with Mr. Douglas Anderson and Dr. Verlyn Flieger. Mr. Anderson is an acknowledged expert in the textual history and development of both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Along with Dr. Flieger and Dr. Michael D. C. Drout, he co-founded and edits the journal *Tolkien Studies*. Dr. Flieger, a well-known Tolkien scholar, is the author of *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* and *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (1997). She has also written a fantasy novel, *Pig Tale*. The Co-Directors will be meeting with Institute participants, and by the end of the week, we hope everyone will have mapped out a grade level and focus for their individual projects on developing teaching materials. There will be a reception for the Institute participants and visiting experts later in the week hosted by the Departments of Literature and Languages and History.

**Week Two:** July 20-24. The second and third weeks will focus on an evaluation of the historicity of *The Lord of the Rings*. Week two will concentrate on the novel's medieval elements. Readings will include Blair's *The Anglo-Saxon Age* and Heaney's *Beowulf*. There will be four visiting experts, each providing one day of lecture and discussion. Dr. Edward James, a well-known historian of early medieval Europe, will discuss the ways in which Tolkien incorporated Anglo-Saxon culture into *The Lord of the Rings*. Dr. Charles Nelson will discuss Tolkien's debt to medieval literature. Dr. Elizabeth Whittingham will present to the participants her research on mythology in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Mr. Jason Fisher, a philologist of Old English and Old Norse, will discuss how Tolkien's work as a philologist influenced his fiction. In addition, the participants will view Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

**Week Three:** July 27-31. Week three will explore the ways in which the twentieth century shaped the presentation of the medieval in *The Lord of the Rings*. The participants will read Garth's *Tolkien and The Great War*. There will be three visiting experts. Ms. Janet Brennan Croft will discuss the influence of World War I on J. R. R. Tolkien, who served as a signaler and fought in the notorious Battle of the Somme. Dr. Ralph Wood will explore the influence of modern English Catholicism on Tolkien's work; Tolkien was a devout Catholic. Ms. Edith Crowe will discuss Tolkien's fiction in the light of the feminism of Tolkien's lifetime as well as the ways in which current feminists read Tolkien's work. Participants will have a second individual meeting with an Institute director to discuss both their progress on the research and creation of teaching materials and their work with the wiki. Finally, participants will view Jackson's *The Two Towers*.

**Week Four:** August 3-7 The fourth week will be devoted to understanding the avenues through which Tolkien's version of the Middle Ages came to be dominant in modern culture. There will be three visiting experts. Dr. Charles W Sullivan III will provide a context for understanding Tolkien's contribution by discussing the influence of mythology and folklore on modern literature. Dr. Amy Sturgis will discuss the influence of Tolkien on modern fantasy writers. Dr. Faye Ringel will discuss how women writers, in particular, were inspired by Tolkien's work. One day this week, the participants will have a picnic at nearby Cooper Lake where they will take part in a poetry-writing exercise based on

Tolkien's mythology. There will be a viewing of the Jackson's *The Return of the King*. At the close of the week, the Directors will lead a discussion in which the participants will discuss their evaluation of the historicity and influence of Tolkien's novel and Jackson's film adaptation, and how that evaluation might contribute to their teaching.

**Week Five:** August 10-14 During the fifth week, three visiting experts will provide examples of subjects that might be taught using *The Lord of the Rings*. Mr. David Bratman will present his work on the geography of Middle-earth. Dr. Kristine Larsen, a professor of physics and astronomy, will present her research on astronomy and science in Tolkien's fiction using the planetarium facilities on campus. Ms. Deborah Sabo, an archeologist who has done field work in England, among other locations, will introduce the participants to Tolkien's use of medieval archeological settings. There will be no assigned reading this week so that participants may focus more fully on their projects. Near the end of the week, the participants will present their teaching materials in a mini-conference. Finally, the Directors will lead a discussion in which the participants will reflect on what they learned, and discuss the dissemination of the material to others. The Institute will conclude with a farewell reception hosted by the History Department.

### **Stipend**

The stipend for the Institute scholars is \$3800.00 for the five week session. The first check, consisting of 1/3-1/2 the total amount will be waiting for Institute scholars when they arrive. The second check will be given out about halfway through the Institute.

It is possible to arrange for the cost of housing and a campus meal plan to be deducted from the stipend. Additionally, participants will have the option to share a mid-day meal with the visiting scholars, and the cost of those can be deducted from the stipend ahead of time.

### **Transportation**

Commerce is approximately 60 miles northeast of the Dallas-Ft. Airport. No public transport exists between the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport and Commerce. The Institute Directors and Graduate Assistants will be available to pick up Institute Scholars at the airport before the Institute starts and to take them to the airport when the Institute is over. A cab from the airport to Commerce costs approximately \$200-500. Rental cars are one possibility for scholars who wish to be able to explore the area on their own. Institute scholars who wish to remain on campus during the five weeks of the Institute will not need a car.

### **Housing**

Institute scholars will be offered housing in apartment-style campus residences, at New Pride Apartments. New Pride Apartments are made up of 50 2-bedroom/2-bathroom apartments and 50 4-bedroom/2-bathroom apartments and a community center. Each bedroom includes a bed, closet, dresser, bookshelf, cube and a desk with a chair. The bathroom has a shower/bathtub. The kitchen has a full size stove/oven, dishwasher, garbage disposal, microwave, oven, refrigerator, pantry space, cupboards, and a table with four chairs. The

living room is comprised of a couch with pillows, chair, coffee table, and two stackable cubes. Each living room and bedroom has extended cable service and an Ethernet connection. A smoke detector is located in each bedroom and in the living room. Each apartment is equipped with central heat and air. The laundry facilities are located at the community center, and include ten washers and dryers (\$.75 to wash and \$.50 to dry). Machines work on a debit card system and there is a machine to add value to your card located inside the community center. Virtual Tours of a bedroom and living room can be accessed here:

[http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/housing/new\\_pride.asp](http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/housing/new_pride.asp)

Questions about New Pride can also be asked of the residence staff. The office number is (903) 468-4422, and the hours are Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-2 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 2 p.m. - 4 p.m., and 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. (Central Time).

General residence hall policies on campus can be found on the FAQ page at:

<http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/housing/faqs.asp>

The New Pride Apartment room rates for 2008 were:

2 Bedroom: \$715  
4 Bedroom: \$650

The meal plans (which are expected to go up 10%) are:

		0-50	51-100	101 and over
Per person	Breakfast	\$2.70	\$2.50	\$2.30
	Lunch	\$5.45	\$5.00	\$4.65
	Dinner	\$8.15	\$7.60	\$7.00
	Total	\$16.30	\$15.10	\$13.95

If scholars wish to bring families, we can work with them to get housing in the Family Student Housing on campus. Family Housing provides modern, air-conditioned apartments available for students having spouses and/or dependent children living with them. There are one and two-bedroom apartments consisting of a living room, kitchen and bath. Cable, Ethernet and phone services are provided in each apartment. A playground facility is located within the family housing complex. A&M-Commerce has 168 apartments available for this population of students.

We strongly recommend scholars take advantage of the campus housing because rental opportunities in Commerce are primarily geared to an undergraduate population. However, if you wish to choose to find other housing, we will make every effort to assist you. Possible

options would be renting an apartment in Commerce or staying at the Holiday Inn Express.

If you wish to look at a map of our campus where everything except the agricultural barns and fields is within easy walking distance, please go to:

<http://www7.tamu-commerce.edu/campus-map/default.asp>

## Academic resources

### *Library*

The James G. Gee Library at Texas A&M-Commerce has an open-stack collection of more than 1,400,000 books, bound periodicals, pamphlets, archival materials, and curriculum materials. The microform reading areas contains extensive collection of microform materials, readers, and printers. The library provides access to a wide variety of CD-Rom products and Internet databases, indexes, and full-text periodicals at any campus networked PC. Most library materials are listed in the library information online network which can be searched using terminals in the library and networked PCs on campus. The library has both wireless internet and a computer lab available. Summer hours are: Monday-Thursday 7:30 am - 9:00 pm, Friday, 8:00 am - 5:00 pm, Sunday 2:00- pm - 9 pm (closed Saturdays).

*Computer Lab:* The library's main computer lab is equipped with 60 computers, two scanners and 2 High Speed HP laser printers. The scanners are located at computers #6 & #7 and will be available all hours that the Library is open. The scanning equipment is self-service. Printing is available in the lab using the LION card. Scanned material can be saved to a CD or USB/Flashdrive. Transparencies and color copies can be done in the Digital Copy Centre located in the MSC.

Software available in the main computer lab includes

- Internet Explorer
- Microsoft Office 2007
- ProDocs
- Works
- Sketchpad
- SPSS
- Engineering software
- and TExcet Examination software

Main computer lab computers may also be used to search the library online catalog and all of the Library databases. You may either print, download full text articles, or in some databases, e-mail a copy of an article to yourself.

*Wireless Internet:* Institute scholars can have access to wireless internet while they are inside the library. Signal strength / signal coverage varies around the library, and information can be found at <http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/library/services/wireless/maps/>

Users will need to purchase their own laptop and wireless card. The library has **\*three\*** laptops with an integrated wireless card available for **in-library** checkout at the circulation

desk. Users will also need free VPN software from Technology Services if they want to use the wireless network. A VPN (Virtual Private Network) is a secure connection between two locations on a network or series of networks through which traffic is encrypted.

Institute scholars will get faculty wireless access (Wireless VPN – Faculty).

*Audio/Visual Stations:* Gee Library has three multimedia listening stations. Users can watch DVD's or listen to CD's, LP's, and cassette tapes. The locked carrels are located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, in close proximity to our musical score collection. The carrels are available on a first-come-first-served basis, for use during the library's normal hours. Recordings, headphones, and keys can be checked out at the Circulation Desk. Users can also use their own wireless enabled laptop to access the Web in the carrels.

*Study rooms:* There are four study rooms that can be reserved for group study/discussions sessions. The rooms seat 10-15 people. At the beginning of the term, groups of Institute scholars can reserve any study room that is free at the time they wish to meet outside class. There are also desks and tables throughout the five floors of the Library which can be used at any time they are free, and a special "quiet maintained" study area on the second floor.

### Curriculum Library

Gee Library contains one of the largest curriculum libraries in the state of Texas. Its holdings include a wide range of resource materials useful in preparing lessons plans and supplementing K-12 learning activities. The Curriculum Library houses the Kraus Curriculum Development Library (KCDL) which contains in excess of seven thousand curriculum guides from schools districts throughout the United States and Canada. The Curriculum Library has printed indexes for 1978 through 1997 and the cumulative index on CD-ROM for 1983 through 1997. A complete collection of Great Explorations in Math and Science (GEMS) can be found as well. Online access to curriculum guides in the ERIC database is also available. Students may access these resources on the public computers in the Curriculum Library. More information on the Curriculum Library and its special materials can be found at:

[http://www7.tamu-commerce.edu/library/curl.htm#Curriculum Library Materials](http://www7.tamu-commerce.edu/library/curl.htm#Curriculum%20Library%20Materials)

### **Cultural and recreational resources**

Texas A&M University-Commerce is located in rural Texas, about 60 miles north-east of the Dallas-Ft. Worth "Metroplex." The closest major/hub airport is Dallas/Fort Worth airport.

The town of Commerce offers visitors the quiet rural ambience of the Shire rather than the metropolitan amenities of Minas Tirith. Institute scholars who are interested in visits to museums or other cultural activities in Dallas will wish to rent a car. The Metroplex has a wide range of restaurants, museums, movie houses, and theatres. Institute scholars may be interested in seeing the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Latino Cultural Center, the Meadows Museum of Spanish Art, or the Women's Museum at Fair Park. Ft. Worth has the Modern Art Museum of Ft. Worth, Kimball Art Museum and Amon Carter Museum.

The Directors will also work with a Social Committee made up of Institute scholars to organize trips to the Metroplex Area in university vans for those who wish.

The university has its own amenities as well, including a new student center and a recreation center, each with a number of attractive features.

The university opened a newly constructed student center in December 2008. Pictures can be seen: <http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/msc/Images/NewMSC/index.html>

WebCam: <http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/live/>

The new Sam Rayburn Student Center features media-smart meeting rooms, a food court with an Einstein's Bagel and Deli, digital gaming room, new billiards tables, dining room, informal lounges and patios. Guests have access to lockers equipped with power outlets to securely recharge laptops, phones and cameras.

A great feature is the The Club which offers sixteen 46" flat panels, a 16 foot high-def big screen and wireless tabletop speakers for listening you your favorite channel. There is total Wi-Fi coverage for the building and patios in addition to hard wire connections in hallways and meeting rooms.

The Campus Bookstore and Convenience Store, cash machine, InfoDesk – Campus Concierge, Graf/x Place, Digital Copy Centre, Pride Shop and Video Wall are located on the first floor. Printing and presentation needs can be taken care of in the Service Center and Graf/x place.

The university campus has a recreation center which includes a swimming pool and a rock-climbing wall as the usual exercise equipment. Scholars will have a choice of membership options.

They can pay the faculty rate of \$100.00 which covers unlimited use for June, July, and August. The university does not allow "split" membership for the two summer terms.

The regular daily rate in Summer 2009 is projected to be \$5.00 a day, but the recreation center offers "package deals" on the day passes. Participants can buy 15 passes for \$25.00, or 25 passes for \$40.00.

More information about the recreation center may be found at:

<http://www7.tamu-commerce.edu/reccenter>

### **Applicants and Application Process:**

Institute scholars will be selected by a committee of four, consisting of the two Directors as well as a secondary History teacher and a secondary English teacher.

The committee will apply the general eligibility and selection criteria provided by the N.E.H. (in a handout included with this letter). The additional criteria applied for this Institute are:

- Familiarity with *Lord of the Rings*
- Teaching experience in history, literature and other relevant humanities subjects (although there will no predetermined ratio set for the disciplines).

Priority will be given to people who have not participated in an N.E.H.-sponsored institute or seminar in the past three years.

The most important part of the application is the essay, which should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to the particular project; your interest, both intellectual and personal, in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation, including any individual research and writing projects; and the relation of the study to your teaching.

Full application information is included in a separate attachment sent with this letter. Your completed application should be postmarked no later than March 2, 2009, and should be addressed as follows: Dr. Robin Anne Reid, Department of Literature and Languages, A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX 75429.

Please contact [Robin\\_Reid@tamuc.edu](mailto:Robin_Reid@tamuc.edu) (903-886-5268) if you have any further questions. We hope to see you in Middle-earth next summer!

Sincerely,

Dr. Robin Anne Reid

Dr. Judy Ann Ford

Professor  
Literature Languages

Professor and Head  
History Department