

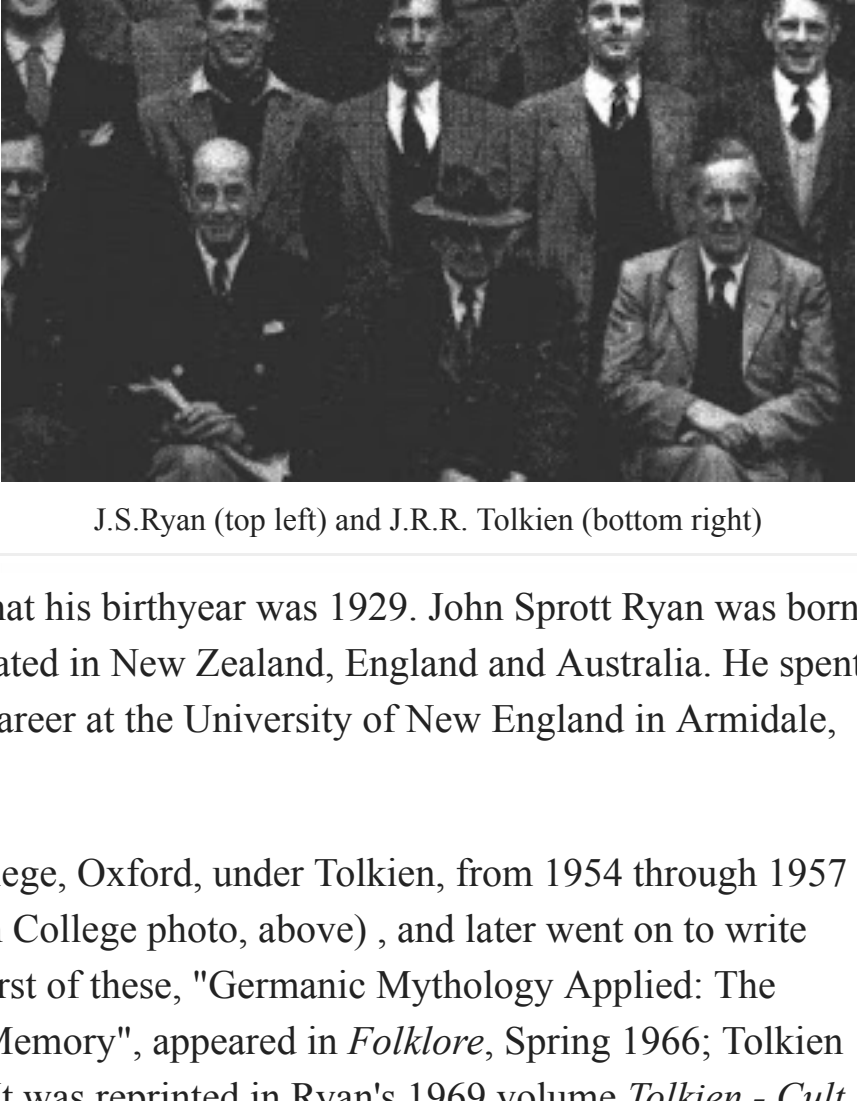
Tolkien and Fantasy

Musings on Tolkien and modern fantasy literature.

Sunday, August 7, 2022

RIP: J. S. Ryan

A quick note to remark on the passing of Tolkien's former student, J.S. Ryan, who later published a number of books on Tolkien. Ryan died in early July at the age of approximately 93. I say approximately because Ryan himself had a policy of never giving out his birthyear ("lest it be used against me" he once wrote me). However, as his parents were married in 1928, and considering genealogical records (including ship's passenger lists from the 1950s), it seems pretty certain that his birthyear was 1929. John Sprott Ryan was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, educated in New Zealand, England and Australia. He spent most of his academic teaching career at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia.

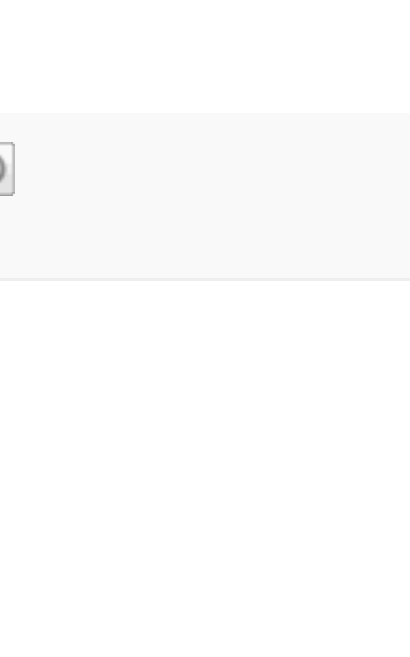


J.S. Ryan (top left) and J.R.R. Tolkien (bottom right)

He was a student at Merton College, Oxford, under Tolkien, from 1954 through 1957 (both appear in the 1955 Merton College photo, above), and later went on to write many articles on Tolkien. The first of these, "Germanic Mythology Applied: The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory", appeared in *Folklore*, Spring 1966; Tolkien himself found it "nonsensical". It was reprinted in Ryan's 1969 volume *Tolkien - Cult or Culture?*, one of the earliest book-length studies of Tolkien. From there, Ryan published a large number of articles, often elaborating on small points in Tolkien's life, in diverse venues such as *Anor*, *Inklings-Jahrbuch*, *Ipotesi*, *Orana*, *Quadrant*, *The Ring Bearer*, and others, as well as in fanzines such as *Minas-Tirith Evening-Star* (of the American Tolkien Society), and scholarly journals such as *Mythlore* (the journal of the Mythopoeic Society). Several of his contributions to *Minas Tirith Evening-Star* were collected as *The Shaping of Middle-earth's Maker: Influences on the Life and Literature of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1992), as by John S. Ryan ["J.S. Ryan" being his usual byline], edited by Philip W. Helms and published by the American Tolkien Society.

His most significant collections for the Tolkien scholar remain the two published by Walking Tree Publishers (edited and prefaced by Peter Buchs), *Tolkien's View: Windows into His World* (2009) and *In the Nameless Wood: Explorations in the Philological Hinterland of Tolkien's Literary Creation* (2013).

In 2012, a slightly-corrected reprint of *Tolkien - Cult or Culture?* was issued through the Heritage Futures Research Centre at the University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales, in a reportedly very small edition, which received little attention. (My copy was expensive and not easily procured.)



2012 edition

Posted by Douglas A. Anderson at 6:14 PM



Labels: J.R.R. Tolkien, J.S. Ryan

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Douglas A. Anderson is the author of *The Annotated Hobbit* (1988; revised and expanded edition 2002). He is currently Book Reviews Editor of the peer-reviewed online *Journal of Tolkien Research* (founded 2014). His anthologies of fantasy literature include *Tales Before Tolkien* (2003) and *Tales Before Narnia* (2008). *More Tales Before Tolkien* is due out in 2026. He is also managing director of the small publishing firm Nodens Books.

Besides his blogs on Tolkien and Fantasy (mostly Tolkien-related) and *A Shiver in the Archives*, which highlights literary discoveries, he contributes to the blog *Wormwoodiana*, devoted to classic "literature of the fantastic, supernatural and decadent." And for those with even more rarified bibliophilic tastes, he also does a personal blog for *Lesser-Known Writers*.

Two blogs are devoted to favorite neglected writers [Leonard Cline](#) and [Kenneth Morris](#).

Links to recommended online articles can be found at [Blinks: Read and Recommended](#).

Speaking Engagements

14-16 May 2026. Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan. 61st International Congress on Medieval Studies.

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- Lingwë - Musings of a Fish**
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- Too Many Books and Never Enough**
Book Notes, January-June 2024
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