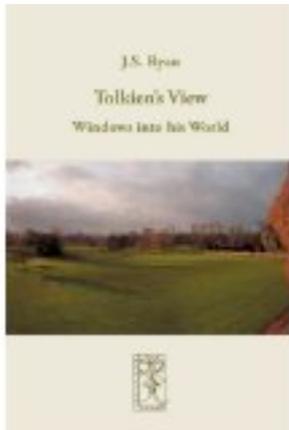


Reviews

RYAN, J. S., *Tolkien's View: Windows into his World*, Zurich and Jena, Walking Tree Publications, 2009, xv, 286 pp., £15.00.



This attractively presented book gathers together a selection of twenty of Professor John S. Ryan's enlightening and enlightened papers on the life and work of J. R. R. Tolkien. The title is notably apt, as the essays shed light on a myriad topics directly germane to the Tolkien canon, offering numerous perceptive insights into the many diverse influences which helped to shape both the man and his writing. John Ryan's work on Tolkien is widely known and admired, but the papers in this collection, with one exception, were originally published in widely scattered journals, so it is especially useful to have them assembled here, not least to indicate the depth and breadth of this aspect of their author's prolific output.

The collection is divided into two parts, the first comprising "Early Biographic Pieces and Emerging Tastes" (six essays), and the second, forming the bulk of the material, deals with "The Young Professor and his Early Publishing" (fourteen essays). The papers were written over a period of some thirty years, apart from the fourth contribution, which is a new piece. As noted in the Preface, the author is one of the few of Tolkien's students who can tell us about his life and work at close quarters, and he is "uniquely well positioned to give us an insight into [Tolkien's] world". Some of the essays have been slightly amplified or clarified, as appropriate, but each offers challenges to future scholars to explore new and/or neglected avenues into Tolkien's life and work.

The essays range extraordinarily widely, demonstrating their author's remarkable grasp of diverse scholarly fields, and his enviable analytical skills. Part A considers the influences of J. H. Shorthouse, Elizabeth Mary Wright (and concomitantly of her husband Joseph), and Sir William Craigie, along with a discussion of Tolkien's early writings. In Essay 5, "Homo Ludens", we begin to see glimpses of Tolkien's imaginative thought, in his own words, as for example in his claim that "the basis of all his creative writing was linguistic", his interest in play-language, or the assertion that "the making of language and mythology are related functions". At the same time, many fascinating details of his early life and career are skilfully sketched in, bringing us closer to the man himself.

The wealth of papers in Part B opens with an account of the influence of G. S. Gordon, and especially of the relationship between language and literature, and the notion that "the language defined the story, even as it enshrined its style and its meaning" (p. 69). We then learn of Tolkien's work on the *Oxford English Dictionary* and his interest in lexicography in general, along with his collaboration with Kenneth Sisam on Middle English texts. This is followed by an outline of his role in shaping the English syllabus at Oxford,

linking language and literature, but including Germanic Philology, Gothic, Old Norse, and Old Icelandic. Attention then turns to his poem “Mythopoeia” as an early statement of his artistic and religious position – themes taken up in several of the succeeding essays. This leads on to a consideration of the relationships between philology and mythology, against the background of the notorious debate between Max Müller and Andrew Lang, and the work of A. H. Sayce. This is a succinct and convincing essay which reveals the influence of these scholars on Tolkien right up to the time of his retirement.

Essay 12 looks at the world of the epic, and includes detailed linguistic analysis to support its arguments, including a fascinating disquisition on Tolkien’s fondness for compound words. This moves on into the discussion of Germanic folk belief and memory regarding burial mounds in the next essay, in which he notes that “alien” incidents in *The Lord of the Rings* can “re-animate ideas and legends long familiar but temporarily forgotten by modern man, sundered from the timeless landscape”. The work of Christopher Dawson on metahistory, and his influence on Tolkien’s mental and spiritual views, are then taken up, before we come to a major essay (Number 15) on Folktale, Fairy Tale, and the Creation of a Story. Here, Ryan draws attention to such neglected aspects of Tolkien’s stance as “love of the land of England and the allurements of the riddle of the past”, and contends that “The relevance of the fairy story to reality lies in the ‘sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth’ ”.

The following three essays focus respectively on the influence of the Wild Hunt, *Sir Orfeo*, and Germanic mythology on Tolkien’s work. The discussion reveals Ryan’s close reading and astute analysis of his many sources, including detailed comments on words and names from the Germanic world, and the origins of pivotal terms such as *ent*, *orc*, *warg*, etc. As he puts it, in assessing the influence of these topics, “The total achievement of Professor Tolkien in his mythical works is to re-interpret the ethos of the Heroic Age, to stress for the English the cyclic nature of history by an imaginative construct of the world before our own”. The penultimate essay, briefly positing common patterns in the pursuit and assault narrative elements in Stoker’s *Dracula* with similar themes in Tolkien’s writing, is perhaps the most speculative.

For me, the excursion into the world of the puca in the final essay held a particular fascination, after I had adjusted to the fact that it was dedicated to the memory of Kathleen (sic Katharine) M. Briggs – an unexpected oversight in an otherwise impeccably edited volume. As in several of the previous essays, the detailed linguistic analysis here is highly illuminating in its search for origins and parallels to Tolkien’s Púkel-men. In my own tentative forays into the murky etymological world of the *puck/bug/bogey* group I would have benefited from Owen Barfield’s statement, aptly quoted in Ryan’s discussion: “The more common a word is and the simpler its meaning, the bolder very likely is the original thought which it contains”.

Taken as a whole, the collection of essays brought together here covers a remarkable range, and offers an abundance of insights into Tolkien’s life and work, opening up new and exciting fields of enquiry. The essays identify and discuss in depth the many influences which helped to shape his complex literary canon, and bring us closer to the man and to his

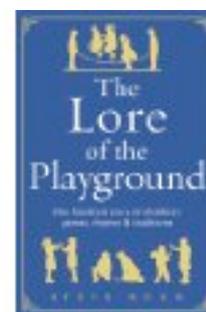
achievements. His work is memorably summed up by Professor Ryan in the conclusion to Essay 18, which may also be seen as emblematic of the scope and accomplishments of this unique collection:

“Professor Tolkien may be seen as the most complex of modern myth-makers. While the form of his writing is heroic-romance-elegy, the use of folk-epic and Northern mythological imagination produces a remarkable depth and so increases the force of his moral and theological scheme. Like all true myth the epic bears no specific message, despite its heavy overtones of moral significance. It has mythic scope and its quality of originality is all the more enhanced by being fused to materials which give it vast sweep and mythic timelessness.”

J. D. A. Widdowson

ROUD, STEVE, *The Lore of the Playground: One hundred years of children's games, rhymes & traditions*, London, Random House, 2010, xv, 560pp., £20.00.

“Children don't *play* today – it's just a lot of running about and shouting”. How quickly we as adults forget that children's play is essentially carried on (even if under the grownups' noses) amongst themselves, with no reference to the grownups. Adults fail to realise that their own play as children, which was to them rich with private rules and arcane rituals, would probably have appeared just as random to an uninitiated onlooker. Steve Roud aims to set the record straight, as he states in his Introduction:



“What I have set out to do ... is to disprove the pessimists who think children no longer play, and show how games and rhymes have been endlessly modified and reinvented, or sometimes abandoned and replaced, over the past century”.

In lively, eminently readable style, and obvious enthusiasm for his subject, Steve Roud proceeds to do just that. He presents here a comprehensive comparative study and geographical/ chronological analysis of children's play over the past hundred years, calling on an impressive wealth of source material from all over the UK. Using both his own recent fieldwork and digging deep into his own archives, Roud usefully compares and contrasts his own findings with the work of other researchers both current and past. These sources were further enhanced by the contributions of respondents to a questionnaire posted on the *Lore of the Playground* website since 2008.

The book is thoughtfully structured and attractively presented. Essentially it is divided into seven Parts, encompassing every possible aspect of children's play: chasing games, games of skill, skipping games, hopscotch, marbles, conkers, and ball games, collections, singing and clapping games, counting out rhymes and other rituals, other rhymes and parodies “Just for Fun”, and children's superstitions, divination rhymes, and calendar customs. Parts 1-6 each conclude with an “Interlude” – a short reflective essay on some

aspect of children's play, discussing historical issues such as whether or not boys and girls play together or separately, rough play, differences between town and country children, conditions in school playgrounds and other play areas in the pre- and post-WWII periods, and the modern tendency for parents to limit their children's opportunities for unsupervised play. In particular we come right up to date with a longer overview of play in today's multi-cultural playground, contributed by Mavis Curtis, who has made a special study of this subject. These essays help to ensure that in recording impressive numbers of actual recorded games and quoted rhymes and dits, depth of analysis is not neglected, and no aspect of children's lore is left unaddressed.

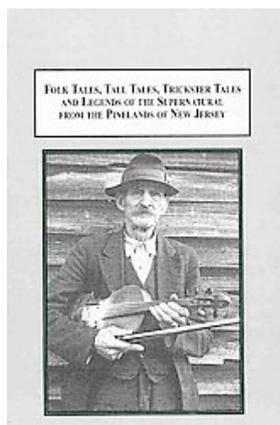
The book includes a number of photographs. It is a shame that, in a book of this calibre, glossy plates were not used; but such are the economic constraints in publishing today. The photographs are somewhat hurriedly bundled together at the beginning of each chapter, but are nevertheless illustrative and enlightening. For reference there is an impressively comprehensive bibliography and an excellent index. The list of References to quotations works well and performs the invaluable task of avoiding clutter in the text itself.

This book will appeal to a wide readership. It is one of those rare works which bridge the gap between the layman and the professional, being of sufficient intrinsic interest to appeal to the general reader, but rigorous enough in its analysis to provide a rich resource to the professional folklorist. Schoolteachers will also find much of value in the insights in this work.

This reviewer is in a position to know firsthand just how much hard and painstaking work has gone into this book. In his Acknowledgements, Steve Roud expresses his gratitude to the Opies for setting a fine standard to follow. In hoping that "... my efforts come somewhere close to carrying on the work you started so well" he has no need to worry; this book is an eminently worthy successor to their pioneering work.

Janet Alton

HALPERT, HERBERT, *Folk Tales, Tall Tales, Trickster Tales and Legends of the Supernatural from the Pinelands of New Jersey*, Lewiston, Queensport, Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 2010, xi, 644pp.



The tales in this collection were collected by Herbert Halpert in the field between 1936 and 1951. They formed the bulk of his doctoral dissertation at Indiana University in 1947. During his long and distinguished career he returned frequently to these stories, whenever his many other commitments permitted, with the aim of annotating them as fully as possible, to draw attention to the rich variety of narratives found in just a single region of the United States, and to set them in their international context. Assisted by his wife Violetta, and his friend Carl Withers, he worked on the collection intermittently for over fifty years, drawing on his unique knowledge of narrative

tradition in North America, Europe, and beyond.

By the time of his death in 2000, the work was at last almost finished, and it became possible to prepare it for publication. The tales are presented in two parts: Part I comprises stories about tricksters; rhyming taunts and insults, unexpected remarks, surprising answers and retorts; fools and simpletons; human behaviour; strong men, great eaters, and tall tale heroes; other tall tales; humorous tales about fear of the supernatural; and riddle tales, miscellaneous stories and dits. Part II is devoted to stories about Fiddler Sammy Giberson; devils, witches, fortunetelling, the otherworld, and buried treasure; and Jerry Munyhun, the wizard of the Pines. Most of the tales are comparatively short, and were taken down by hand in the days before portable electrical recording equipment became readily available. With extraordinary skill perfected during many years of fieldwork, Herbert Halpert was able not only to write down the stories but also to preserve the essential features of the oral narrative style of the tellers. Sometimes he was able to collect the same basic narrative from more than one narrator, giving plenty of scope for comparative annotation.

The notes which follow each of the two Parts of this collection amply demonstrate the superlative range and depth of the author's quest to identify possible sources and parallels in the pantheon of traditional narrative. As Carl Lindahl states in his Preface:

“His knowledge of the folk culture of the New Jersey Pines is reflected ... through his invaluable references to local vocabulary, proverbial lore, work activities, beliefs, customs, social relations, and other aspects of American, British, and Irish folklife. The notes constitute a masterful series of mini-studies on the structure, themes, and contents of various tale types.”

The comparative annotation utilises the Aarne-Thompson Type Index and Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, as the work was largely completed before the publication of the Uther Classification. This has its advantages, not least in bringing consistency to the comparative references (often new or updated) to Baughman's *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, and to type and motif indexes of traditional narratives from other cultures.

Of course, comparative annotation cannot be truly comprehensive, even within the limits set by this collection. Nevertheless, the notes on these New Jersey tales make fascinating reading. They not only illustrate the author's erudition, gleaned from a lifetime of extensive searching and reading, but also achieve his central aim of setting these narratives in their fuller global context. The notes make it abundantly clear that these diverse and often brief stories have ancient roots in the original homelands of the early settlers, and indeed further afield. As Carl Lindahl puts it: “There is no richer, no more representative collection of tales from a single American region than can be found between the covers of this book”.