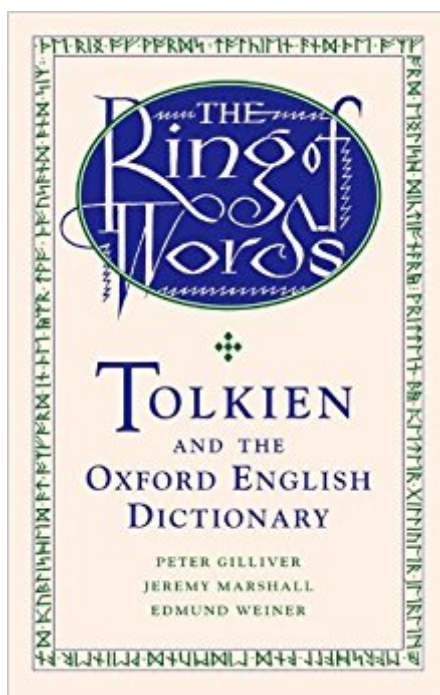


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The Ring Of Words: Tolkien And The Oxford English Dictionary



Synopsis

The Ring of Words describes the powerful and unique relationship between Tolkien's creative use of the English language in his fictional works and his professional work on the Oxford English Dictionary. Tolkien's earliest employment was as an assistant on the staff of the OED, and he later said that he had 'learned more in those two years than in any other equal period of [his] life'. Here three authors, themselves senior editors of the OED, engage directly with Tolkien's language and his fictional world. Two discursive sections explore Tolkien as a lexicographer and his creativity as a word user and creator. The main section of the book is made up of individual 'word studies' which explore over 100 words found in Tolkien's fiction in terms of their origins, development, and significance in his fictional world. Words such as 'hobbit', 'attercop', 'precious', 'Smeagol', and 'waybread' are explored in fascinating detail. The Ring of Words offers a new and unexplored angle on the creative world of one of our most famous and well-loved writers, presenting new archive material for the first time.

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Customer Reviews

I've just started to plow through this detailed history of Tolkien's involvement with the development of the first edition of the OED. I did not know what to expect and should not have been surprised to see the level of detail in presenting Tolkien as a lexicographer and wordwright, as well as, exploring numerous examples of Tolkien's contributions through word studies and his ever-focused interest in philology. *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary*, is a welcomed glimpse into Tolkien's participation and influence in the rigorous process of establishing the one and only dictionary of dictionaries, the OED. I would also add that this is not an easy read in that you really have to enjoy the extremely concentrated focus, peculiarities, and origins of words. It is intended for those who savor the detailed personality and skill it takes to establish a standard definition for a given word from the past or one that is created out of the wonderfully complex mind of Tolkien himself. It is one thing to flesh out the meaning of a single word and totally another thing to see Tolkien take his experience working on the OED as the springboard for creating several complete languages of the peoples and creatures of middle-earth. I look forward to mining through the little details and nuances presented in this book and hope that it will enable me (and you) to see the larger world of words with greater appreciation for Tolkien's imprint on the OED and society as well.

This short (229 pages plus bibliography and index) but highly important work will become an absolute necessity for all Tolkien admirers. There are three sections. The first deals with Tolkien's brief but productive period working on the Oxford English Dictionary. The authors, who are all Editors of the OED, were able to examine the actual scraps of paper on which Tolkien wrote drafts for definitions and etymologies of words (primarily beginning with W) to be included in the OED. To an outsider such work could seem tedious in the extreme, but since the authors are as fascinated by the origins and developments of words as Tolkien was himself, they help us see how intriguing such work can be. (Indeed, Tolkien was so enthusiastic that many of his definitions had to be severely edited by the then Editor, who thus gained time and space at the expense of some great scholarship.) The second section, on Tolkien as wordwright, I found particularly interesting. Having been an enthusiastic student of Middle earth since the age of 12 in 1969, I am very familiar with Tolkien's enormous vocabulary and love of words, and this section brings new light to Tolkien's deep knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and other ancient tongues, and to his readings of such authors as

William Morris and H.R. Haggard, among many others. Here the reader recognizes anew that Tolkien's chosen career of philology was not just his job, but also his passion. The third section is devoted to word studies and gives short histories of some of the terms, like Middle earth, Hobbit, mathom, etc, which Tolkien used throughout his writings. These are sometimes archaic terms like nuncheon and sometimes words developed by Tolkien himself such as eucatastrophe and legendarium, which have now entered the English language. This is a scholarly but highly accessible work which will be appreciated by Tolkien scholars and anyone else who loves the English language.

This book is in two parts. The first describes Tolkien's work on the Oxford English Dictionary and how he was able to make good use of his special philological skills. Brief explanations of words that he worked on, as well as technical details of how word origins are traced are given in this section. The second section, about 2/3 of the whole, is made up of entries for various real and "coined" words that Tolkien used in his works. A brief explanation of what the word means, and a quote from his works are given. That is followed by a discussion of the elements from which Tolkien formed the word, and possible variants of that word. "Real" words, mostly taken from Old or Middle English or Old Norse/Icelandic are given historical treatment. "Coined" words, that Tolkien made up out of the roots of "real" words are analyzed to show the components, and how the meaning of each component was used to make a whole word with a meaning that was greater than the sum of its parts. Note that the first part is written in normal chapter format, whereas the second part is more like an encyclopedia or dictionary, with the words as headers, followed by a paragraph or two of explanation.

As a Tolkien fan of 45 years, I found this book highly informative and most enjoyable to read. I was never interested in philology because I thought the subject was too dry. In the hands of these dedicated OED writers, it is anything but. I now have at least a sense of how Tolkien's love of words and their history led him to write the books that I love.

It is quite dense and goes into quite a bit of detail on the process of the OED, which would only interest an OED fan (like me). It does play into Tolkien's collected works, which include letters and quite a bit of information about his interest in invented languages, again, right up my alley, but not for someone looking for a sequel to the Lord of the Rings.

I was having difficulty finding this book, but I most definitely found it on ! I love Tolkien and had only been able to find so much information on his work with the Oxford English Dictionary, but The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary was extremely helpful and added immensely to my research! I'm very satisfied with the book and it arrived before the estimated arrival date.

It arrived perfectly. I needed it because I am doing a specialist course about translation and interpreting, so it helps a lot. Thanks.

Excellent, this item is exactly what I expected.

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